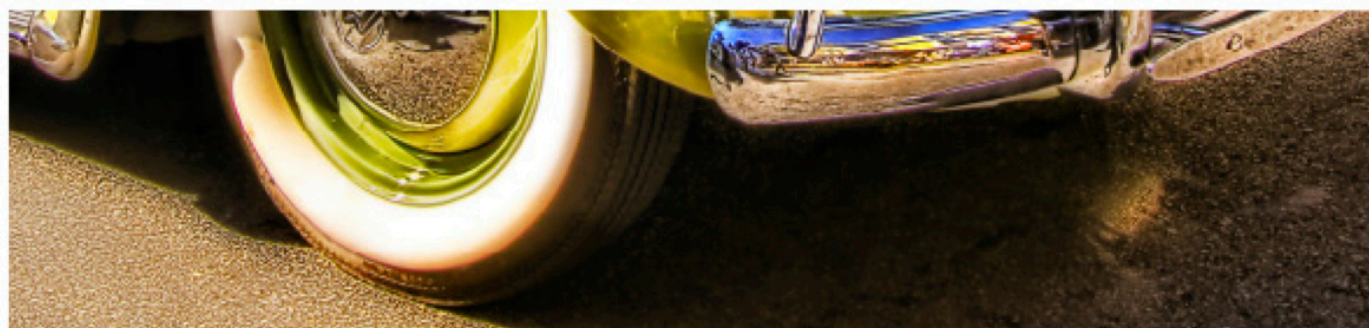




OCHO #31

EDITED BY DIDI MENENDEZ





PHOTOGRAPHY
Diego Quiros

FICTION
Angela Pinedo
Emil DeAndreis

POETRY
Scot Siegel
NF Huth
Ken Taylor
JP Dancing Bear
Angela Lawlor
Kate Hammerich
Diana Adams
Grace Cavalieri
Neil Kelly
Linda Benninghoff
Matthew Hittinger

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Edited by Didi Menendez

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APPLE SEASON

Angela Pinedo

The cooling engine popped. Lalo and his wife were quiet, watching the families meander around the barn. He raised both hands to the steering wheel to drum his fingers against it. She pulled her hair back into a high ponytail.

Lalo asked her, "Lista?"

Sara nodded, rolled up her window, then stepped from the car.

They moved through the packed dirt of the lot towards a barn overflowing with children and fruit. The building had new yellow paint and an enormous cloth sign strung from one end to the other. It read, U-PICK SINCE 1957. TURNOVERS CIDER SAUCE HERE and struggled to free itself but was held fast by two fat cords. Lalo looked to the north and south at the long, even rows of apple trees. Those same old trees. This same old time of year.

"We should've brought sweaters. It's chilly, don't you think?" Sara rubbed her forearms with her hands for warmth as she watched two girls turn somersaults near the picnic tables out front.

"We'll be fine. It's only ten. It'll warm up." He reached for her hand and she gave it, turning toward him to smile.

"I'm glad we came, Lalo."

He pressed against her hand but didn't look over. They approached the door and he held it open.

The barn inside was a noisy cafeteria-style restaurant. Lalo and his wife stood before its menu, and both looked blankly at it.

"I don't think I'm hungry yet. Why don't we eat after?"

She turned away from the sauce sieves, the vats of oil, and her husband. Everybody near the couple seemed so happy, and some of them had even brought cameras. A practical woman, Sara didn't want to shit herself when she died, if possible. That is the sort of thing that she'd considered all week: liberation of the bowels, the first witness, the awful

way her face would appear until they covered her up with a tarp or something.

"What? You hardly ate at breakfast. We always eat first." He raised his voice to match the noise that had overstuffed the room. "You have to eat something. Just take home what you don't want."

"Fine, I'll have a turnover."

"Come on, get some real food. Order me a sandwich and cider, wouldja? I'll find seats for us. Inside or out?"

"I don't care, Lalo. Surprise me."

He walked away from his wife toward some wooden tables, beyond the thick woman near his wife who grasped a youth by the shoulder. The woman insisted that the boy find his sister.

"You know not to let them eyes off of that girl for even one damned second," she said. "You better find her quick else both of you is getting a swat, and you double for being so irresponsible. You're old enough to know better," she shook the boy a bit, "or do you want me to treat you like a seven-year-old too? Now get out and go find her."

The woman saw Sara watching her and asked, "You got kids?"

Sara laughed. "No, we don't."

The woman complimented her smarts and said she should keep it that way. "Kids ain't worth the trouble half the time anyhow. You try to do any thing for those babies, you take their ungrateful bodies someplace special and look how they repay you," she said, "just look how." The woman shook her head.

Sara ordered a sandwich and cider for her husband, and carnitas with black coffee for herself. She found him at that round table near the back door where the apple crates were kept and where the smell was the strongest. This was the same spot at which Lalo sat with his own father as a boy. She placed the trays on the table and joined him. She said that her pork wasn't bad, but he refused a taste anyhow. The couple ate without speaking for awhile.

"I'd like to hike Placerita Canyon. Maybe we can bring a lunch and make a day of it sometime. We can see if the falls are flowing yet. They might be, after the rain last week." She wasn't sure why that had come out of her mouth. She resented that dry creek bed, knew there would be no waterfall, despised hiking, and had no plans to be alive long enough to do any of it anyway. She sipped her coffee and made a face. "This shit tastes like instant. For three dollars you'd think they could make a real cup of coffee." She tore the top from several packets of sweetener all at once, and poured them into her cup.

Lalo took another bite of his sandwich, saying nothing.

She went on, "I'm gonna have to drown it with sugar just to choke it down. Charging three dollars for a styrofoam cup of freeze-dried tar. Unbelievable." She stirred her cup with a fork and tasted it again. "That's a little better, I guess," she said before pausing to imagine what his morning will be like. Where his head would be. "There won't be any flowers out at this time of year, but the hills are turning green. They won't be that way for long; it'll be nice to get away anyhow. To get out and do something together. Something new. Lalo, are you listening?"

He took the last bite from his sandwich and chewed it slowly, then washed it down with cider. His face didn't betray him but he quietly asked her, "What do you call this? Is this the same boring shit we always do, Sara?" He reached for a toothpick in his breast pocket, inside of his old cigarette case. He placed it on his tongue and then tucked it against the side of his mouth.

She stared at him for awhile then replied, "Yes, it is the same shit we always do. Every year. Every year the same orchard where we met. Every year the same table where your father sat. Every year you order the same sandwich, and drink your cider the same way. Every year is the same." She took a bite of pork and chewed for awhile. "I'd rather be nowhere else. I want to be here with you. This is what we do. Not fighting. I mean coming here.

This is what we do." His face softened a bit as she continued, "let's go baby. I want to find some Honeycrisps, Lalo. You go get the Grannies and Jonagolds. You know how I love Honeycrisps." Her eyes were filled with absolution and comfort, and she closed her mouth to form a smile.

His head tilted a bit to the left. His brows came together to form a single line, then broke apart again as one raised itself up. "Alright," he said, "let's meet back here in half an hour. Then maybe we can rest outside and get some turnovers like you wanted. Maybe we'll buy apple butter. We haven't done that in awhile. Hey," he picked up their food trays and paused a moment, considering. "It's something, isn't it?" He mirrored her expression before walking to dump the leftovers..

Sara crossed over toward the basket counter and asked for two. A child ran laughing toward her, but looked behind as if being chased. The girl collided into Sara's legs and grunted a little from the impact, then straightened and looked up with widened eyes into Sara's face.

"Sorry," she said before she ran out to the orchard, laughing again at some inaudible joke by the time the barn was behind her.

The woman at the counter smiled first at Sara, then at Lalo as he approached. "Have fun, you two!" The couple thanked her. Sara handed her husband a bucket and his first kiss in twenty-seven days and they exited the barn separately, he to the south, she to the north.

Sara checked her watch and walked among the quiet rows of trees that smelled of skins and bark and hot leaves. She bounced her basket against each leg alternately, and watched the wind move the branches above. Her arms broke out in goosebumps and she rubbed them, enjoying the sensation. She began to select apples from the trees—nearly ripe some of them, perfectly ripe others. She picked thinking not of today but of next week and the months after that. She wondered how quickly Lalo would move on from his anger. She hoped he found somebody again, somebody better.

She hoped he kept on with another cherry season in the spring. Another summer day in the park eating burnt hot dogs with his friends from work. Another Christmas with that same tiny plastic tree. She held her arm high above her head, gripping a warm apple, but didn't pull it down. Instead she closed her eyes, kept her fist tight around the fruit, and let the cold wind rush over her. She stood like this for awhile.

Lalo walked watching his feet. His basket was empty though he'd already gone a ways from the barn. The girl from earlier played in the mulch before him. Lalo offered her twenty dollars to fill his apple basket. Five now and fifteen when she returned. Her eyes lit up and she rushed away.

"Only the best ones," he called out, "only the ones with red and green mixed in them."

He shaped his hand into a visor to shield his eyes and watched the child move on. She vanished after a few moments, and so he moved a short way into the orchard to sit against a tree. He closed his eyes and allowed the varied temperatures of sun and shade to traverse his body. This marriage had been dead for years and they both knew it. Tomorrow the papers she received would pronounce it. This trip to the orchard was their last. He wasn't sure why he'd insisted on coming here together. Maybe this time she was right: this was theirs. Their tradition. Today, then, was theirs. Here, they could at least pretend to give a shit. Good riddance.

Sara kicked apples that had fallen to the ground before pausing to look up at a strong looking tree. "Yee-ep," she said. She placed the basket and her purse on the ground, bent over to open the latter, and withdrew the length of rope that she'd brought with her. She'd already knotted it, but feeling the rough fibers press against her skin brought her a rush of excitement—joy, really—that she hadn't felt in years. She squinted up to find a branch strong enough to support her and tossed the rope over it, but missed. She tossed again and it caught, but just then Sara heard movement from another branch. She looked up

into the sun and the girl from earlier stared down at her, motionless and fearful like a wild monkey.

"Oh, hello." The girl didn't answer.

"Are you stuck?" The child was still.

"What's your name?" The girl stared down.

"Do your parents know where you are?" She took a bite from an apple but said nothing.

"Why are you in that tree?"

"Apples," the girl replied.

Sara soured. She pulled to retrieve the rope but the girl snatched at it. Sara jerked it defensively away in response, and then there was another rustle, louder this time. After that, a breaking sound and a thud. She looked down and the girl lay there amongst the dead and dying leaves and fruit and with the bitten apple beside her and her leg turned up like a check mark against her small frame. The noose still hung in the tree and Sara still gripped the rope.

"Oh," said Sara. She opened her fists and the length swung free. The girl lay there, her eyes open but not seeing. Her chest moved up and down without rhythm. Her lips opened and shut, then opened and shut again. There was no blood anywhere, but her head looked as though it had somehow become compacted into her neck.

Sara didn't know what to do. Lalo where are you. Lalo, can't you hear. Oh Lalo this isn't what I meant. This baby Lalo. This baby.

Angela lives in the California desert. She has too many pets.

1.

This one does not care for nori but eats it to be polite. The man she hopes to marry does not ask if she wants more sake before emptying the warm vessel into his cup. They've draped their matching bomber jackets over the backrests of the bar chairs. She clicks the heels of her knee-high boots as he mumbles something about a forthcoming fly-fishing trip. At forty-three, he's having a midlife brain-freeze. She no longer wants to hike and has given up Pilates. She has recently passed a threshold.

2.

In the booth opposite the couple in exile, another woman sobs into her menu. Her husband has taken a job in another state. He says it's temporary, insists it beats the military and they should be grateful for a job, any job... Meanwhile, a boy and a girl of her likeness, with sandy blond hair and witch hazel eyes, in unison, ask for more of the shrimp rolls. At times, she can be the strongest person in the world—a *rock star*—her coworkers at the Public Employees Retirement System regional headquarters tell her. Though this is not one of those moments.

3.

Behind fogged glass, a man's face is flushed with the excitement that must come from cutting through line-caught fish. In the gilded mirror, sumo wrestlers on a flat screen embrace in a full-body kiss. She thinks of her husband now eating alone in a diner west of Thermopolis. A woman with a dragon tattoo on her chest and a silver stud in her lip leans over his shoulder. When the waitress, an androgynous waif, comes closer, the children are no longer bickering but eating the last of the veggie tempura, smiling, rocking back and forth in the booth. Now they ask if they can order the mango and coconut mochi.

NF Huth's textual work has appeared in small magazines including Listenlight, The Literary Review, Philadelphia Poets, CWM, and others, and in a chapbook, *Once Water* (Runaway Spoon Press). Her visual poetry was featured at The New Post-Literate, and her book of visual poetry, *sansound*, was published by dbqp. This year, chapbookpublisher.com will publish a chapbook of her visual poetry and LAUGHING/OUCH/CUBE will publish her first book of poems. NF Huth publishes found sound at her audio blog, Click Buzz Chirp, and photographic images that are both pointy and blue at Pointy Blue.

Framing and framed the
squeak and—click open, click
closed. Rain will come.

I am no audrey, pink
improbably cool
symmetrical.

I wash and stretch and sweat
barely can see past
my long-nosed face

to where steam-written words
had lived. I squeaked them
smudged them away

into green treedness
leaves flipping silver
daylilies long

(old dog sleeping beneath)
sun-etched hole above
if I tilt my

little eyes to that blur.
Smell the open and
closed now that night
further blurs the boundaries.
Light pricks the air full
to make more space.

Weather comes from the west
possibly much more
than cloud, rain, snow.

For instance, now, air thick
sweaty with summer
pushes against

(insistent animal
begging attention)
my crooked face.

Somehow I have made this
possible, likely
enough. Enough.



(after nan goldin)

after the diseased tattoos.
after the chintz bedspreads.
come-hither offering a hurt.
discarded squares in the corner.
rough and tumble headboard.
too much sun through the window.
before the heart shreds again.
before the fists start to fly.
all this love to give.
secrets of the smaller compartments.
lost man transitions to deeper.
french drinking songs from birds off screen.
after the second make-out session.
after the celebrity dénouement.
sad wallpaper charged with questions.
elixir turned with a dirty straw.
forced perspective of chronic abandon.
bloody vows without lips parting.
before the tussle and scream.
before knuckles lace hanks of hair.
spooning addiction into waiting laps.
astral dreaming below ground.
hiving behind walls of blue smoke.
wastrel romance with bowery breaths.
after the brownish lust of the shiner.
after the plunger delivers.
day bed taken out at the knees.
reaching again for the leather.
howlin' wolf stalks the squatted rooms.
escape not even contemplated.
before the fuzzy dice of the wedding.
before the drop top and daisy chain.
panties web just past the knees.
a week of clutter upstages fellatio.
hallucinated rain falls up indoors.
need whitewashes the slide show.

KEN TAYLOR **WHY THE TELEPHONE WAS INVENTED**

he calls me from wyoming,
the other end of a tin can, mars.
we shuffle through architecture,
elevations, the project eighty-sixed,
the materials ruffled and sallow
with exposure: our friendship
long ago a fixed and fallow field.
i'm a participant in his gloss
by listening to him. he tries
to compensate by apologizing for
the loss, the progress of word
exchange: letters, emails, texts
that never shot by our buffer.
he ranges among the times exactly
like someone who has suffered
a head injury. i chalk it up to
hard living. he says a motorist
got to him right after he flipped
his bike or he'd likely be dead.
his talk exhumes marred history,
though we don't speak of the lapse.
i felt absurd, weak, bloom free:
walking in on him and her between
semesters. he fumes on, pesters
me to fill in gaps. he is all about
the peach clad asses of cheerleaders
since he lost use of his legs. i reach
for reader glasses, attempt to put
them on over reader glasses.
there is no impetus in a box car
abandoned on an unkempt track –
the cargo rotting phlox. sad echo
of the bad connection. i frown
at my lack after his receiver is down.

Ken Taylor lives and writes in North Carolina. His poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in The Chattahoochee Review, The Stony Thursday Book, The Fish Anthology, elimae, MiPOesias, Whale Sound, The New Guard, Eclectica Magazine, Red River Review, and Poets & Artists.

JP DANCING BEAR **RAISED BY COYOTES**

When we were together there was no desert,
no scrub brush, no urban sprawl.

At night, we went from house to house
looking for cracked windows and pet doors.

We thought ourselves a pack of wolves,
or at least, that was always father's dream.

We would shuffle the pantry, tear into boxes,
dig out the plants from their pots.

Father would lay on the couch, the blue light
of television tiding over us.

Mice skittered and darted among the crumbs
of commercial breaks and station identifications.

Mother loved the taste of books—chewed page
after mysterious page.

I stayed under the coffee table, content
to close my eyes, and listen to the dull banter

and the sitcom laugh-tracks and paint
the flickered scenes on my eyelids.

We were almost a pack once in the new western
desert of a tract home.

J. P. Dancing Bear is the author of *Inner Cities of Gulls* (2010, Salmon Poetry). His tenth collection, *Family of Marsupial Centaurs* will be released by Iris Press in 2011. His poems have been published in *Mississippi Review*, *Third Coast*, *Natural Bridge*, *Verse Daily* and many other publications. He is editor for the *American Poetry Journal* and Dream Horse Press. Bear also hosts the weekly hour-long poetry show, *Out of Our Minds*, on public station, KKUP and available as podcasts.

In my new country, we will have various and more efficient systems of communication, including trees. If we want to tell someone we don't like how they were talking to us in the car or if we need to apologize for our abrupt departure, we will leave notes to such effect nestled in the dogwood trees. If we have found a cache of photographs of baby and grown animals in amusing configurations, we will string those photographs up on the taplines of the sugar maples. On the peeled-back bark of the silver birches, like tall thin advent calendars, we will conduct our ongoing civic debates about whether something is a poem or a prose, and other questions of aesthetics or category that occupy some of us; for instance, brick or slate? vata or pitta? should we reclaim certain mean words or create new, kinder, and more accurate words? In apple trees and avocado trees and pear trees—in all orchards, actually—we will leave our love letters, which if never claimed will have the virtue of entertaining us while we pick fruit for other people to eat, which will be one of our rotating jobs. To the amber sap of the evergreens we will stick folded-up reports of the doings of our comrades in other countries, reports from the field, and the stream and the city street. When we wish to ask people to take walks or come to couples-counseling with us, we will flag the trees nearest to their houses with coded squares of colored cloth. From saplings' delicate limbs we will dangle our friend requests, and around the magnolia gnarls we will tie with ribbons the notices of our name-changes and new pronouns. Wedged into the thick ratty bark of the pines, we will leave invitations to house-warming parties and to the large public art events we will all take turns curating monthly. In the hollows of the eldest redwood trees, I will leave my epics, my catalogues, my icelandic sagas of how I miss your smell and your meatloaf and your every little way.

Andrea Lawlor's writing has appeared or will appear in publications such as *The Brooklyn Rail*, *Jellyfish*, *Route 9*, *MiPOesias*, *Lambda Literary*, and *Encyclopedia*, Vol. II. Lawlor studies, writes, and teaches at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, edits the *Pocket Myths* series and attempts to avoid using personal pronouns in bios.



where I am coming from

I drive the back roads, know
I am alive, the bikes and flags,

the people getting into cars in
slow motion, the quiet rush

of waves against grass, greening
under the sun, the breeze,

sweetly ripening. I drive the
roads to know I am alive,

hands disconnected from my body,
gently steering us home.

daughter

When you were a tiny seed
of life, before I thought to check
for you

I tried to kill myself,
your life, in my
thoughtless body.

Tied a decision
made with hands, slippery
with vomit and blood

a speeding drive down
a winding mountain road,
I chose you before

I knew your name, before
I knew about giving a life
to live.

suicide attempt

From one side:

The tree, a branch,
no breath:

T-3:19

"Do you know where you are?"

In the crackling dark,
nowhere.

From the other:

My clothes are sawed off, the forty dollar bra,
the skirt from my cousin,

trashed at T-3

The tube goes sleekly down my throat, they start
pumping, still no heart beat

and the voice of the doctor goes up,

T-2

the crash cart, fumbled to my side,
the jerk, the collapse

T-1

The holes in my stomach closing, the tentative beep,
the life crept back into a body

Kate has been published in The Susquehanna Review, ditch, Third Wednesday, Barrier Island Review, Verandah Literary Journal, Grasslimb, Kill Poet and has self-published two books, escape artist and hallucinations, cancer & the purple tree. She mostly spends her time rolling on the floor with her daughter and her Husky.

ON SILENCE DEPENDS SUCCESS

Emil DeAndreis

People often ask me about the time I convinced a room full of chain-smoking elders that I wear adult diapers. Since I am only twenty five years old— and people are usually around seventy or eighty before they need to worry about whether or not they are going to be able to tighten it up until the next truck stop— my tremendous feat draws curiosity.

“Why would you put yourself through that?” people ask.

The incentive to participating in any focus group is its generous pay. For an average session, I usually show and discuss anything from sleeping habits to favorite ballpoint pens, and after about an hour I walk away with one hundred dollars cash and a full stomach of their provided, lower-tier pizza.

But when I saw a posting for the DEPENDS ADULT DIAPER focus group, I knew I had struck gold. For that session, one in which people were going to have to be forthright about their humiliating, volatile condition, the pay was going to be enough to compensate for the emotional trauma to which all the participants were going to be subjecting themselves.

I had to get in on the action, so I lied my way in.

The online survey that led to my acceptance was a little Q&A which was there to weed out anyone who didn't know what Depends were, to systematically filter out all the grab-ass leeches that were trying to infiltrate the sensitive issue for their personal profit— like me. The survey went something like this:

Do you use Depends Adult Diapers?

Loyally.

How often would you say you use Depends or any other adult diaper?

With frightening regularity.

For what reason did you decide to try Depends?

For the same reason everyone else does.

Why do you choose Depends over other leading adult diapers?

It is the only diaper that seems prepared.

Do you take issue with speaking of your cumbersome disposition in front of a small audience?
I can manage.

How old are you?

Twenty five. And I know you're thinking “this chump is full of shit, lying his way into a lucrative situation.” And the answer is yes, I am full of shit, which is where Depends comes in, and I trust your focus group does not engage in ageism.

Naturally, I received the formal invite to the Depends Focus Group, which would end up going down as the biggest catastrophe in Depends Adult Diaper history. And that's saying something.

“Why didn't they kick you out the minute you walked in the door? How did you make it through?” people still ask with hints of skepticism and envy. “What did you do to convince them that you wear adult diapers?”

Each time I am asked, the answer is the same. I didn't do a damn thing.

The day of the group, I entered a room where two women, balding and thin, offered a greeting through curtains of smoke rising from Depends ash trays. One woman grumpily introduced herself as Alba. She wore a beige turtle neck, while her partner, Flo, sported a Depends windbreaker in navy blue. In front of the prehistoric women were manila folders with paperwork and Depends poster advertisements— materials to be discussed in the session. In a bag, the contents of which would be issued to us after the focus group as parting gifts, were yellow Depends visors.

Upon entering the room I was melted by glares of bitter skepticism from the other members of the group, about four in total; they suspected me to be exactly what I was—a phony. Initially, I had expected a much bigger turnout, but then realized that Depends had probably thought ahead and made this focus group intimate. I had nowhere to blend in, nowhere to hide.

Alba addressed us after beating her cigarette into the ashtray.

“As a fourteen year dependent of adult diapers, I want to extend my gratitude to you all for coming,” she grumbled. Then she hocked and swallowed something that did not want to go down.

EMIL DEANDREIS ON SILENCE DEPENDS SUCCESS

"We live in a time that puts pressure on us to perform, and what comes easy to some may be a tremendous task for another. Nobody asks for their problems, all we can do is play the hand we're dealt. Some people's hands get messy."

We nodded.

Flo inconspicuously stuck her hand between her legs just to be sure nothing terrible had already happened.

Alba lit another cigarette. "The whole thing is cumbersome."

Flo explained that we would begin the focus group by briefly sharing tales of the first time we knew we had a problem.

I had not been warned of this. Quickly my mind was racing to conjure up a sympathetic and believable tale. Would I say that I had encountered my problem during a stressful test, or at a dinner party? I considered setting the fable at church, or perhaps the library.

Thankfully, Ernst, one of the group's members who was well into his eighties, volunteered to go first. He stood, and it appeared as though his pants had been barely pulled over what looked to be a Styrofoam intertube fastened to his waist. This was the result of, as he would later inform us, his Depends of choice—Thicker Padding—which doubled as a cushion for his aching lower back.

Ernst cleared his throat and put his hands in his front pockets.

"About ten years ago I was walking to my car after work, was finishing up my fiftieth year as director of operations at a paper binding and distribution factory."

People ahhed and whistled congratulations to him. Alba grunted.

"I was tired and ready to get home and take a nap. As I turn the block from my company, I find a fifty dollar bill on the ground. A crisp fifty. Would you believe it?" he aired.

Ernst adjusted his glasses, and already needed to catch his breath.

"So I reach over and pick it up and stash it away and decide, 'I'm gonna have me a nice big dinner

tonight. Steak and potatoes, maybe even some wine. Who knows. I got so excited, had butterflies like I just kissed a girl in grade school!"

"Butterflies," Alba woofed through the smoke of a fresh cigarette. "Already sounds cumbersome."

"Eh?" Ernst offered, bewildered. "So I'm staring at the fifty and smiling. I never found so much money before! It's a good sign, the luckiest day of my life and all. Then I see my car ahead. I see something in the windshield, flapping around. And I says, 'nah, nah! But it's...IT'S...' Ernst's teeth gritted and he started patting his butt furiously. "It's! Son of a bitch!"

We waited.

"Sorry I need to sit down now before I.... lose control of it all."

"Oh. Sit down by all means. Was it a parking ticket, Ernst?" Flo seeped gently.

"Those sons of bitches gave me a parking ticket! A FIFTY DOLLAR, down-to-the-penny PARKING TICKET!" Ernst barked, then farted and suddenly the room was concerned.

"Those situations can become cumbersome, Ernst. Can't they?" Alba hacked through her fifth cigarette.

"Huh?" he asked. Then he looked at me and we both shrugged.

The other two members of the group were growing uncomfortable, likely dreading the inevitable moment when they would be expected to share.

One was a middle aged woman with stiff, curled hair and counter-productively enormous bosoms. She had a look on her face of eternal confusion, as if she was constantly wondering if it was her turn to speak.

The last and final member of the group was a douche bag like me who had obviously lied his way into the situation. I could tell by the smirk that contorted his face every time Alba said "cumbersome." When Ernst got furious about the parking ticket, and began spanking his own ass, the kid had to look down before he laughed out loud. Like me, the kid was in his twenties and was in complete control of his bowels. He wasn't going to last much longer without blowing his cover.

Ernst remained seated, breathing heavily as he continued to fume over the parking ticket.

"Ingall? I move on to you." Alba choked. "Can you take it where Ernst left off and give us a nugget of your...history?"

Ingall jolted to an alert pose and her jugs rippled like a waterbed.

"Um, let's see," she began, shriveling in trepidation. She cupped her breasts briefly, then placed her hands politely on the table.

"Take your time," Alba snorted. "I know how cumbersome this process can be."

The young kid released a noise which caused Alba and Flo to look at him curiously.

"It's cumbersome," she repeated.

The kids eyes were getting teary. He was losing it. A silence overcame the meeting which was prolonged inexplicably. I watched the kid bite his lip and battle all of his inner urges to explode with laughter. Ingall nervously adopted her look of confusion as to whether or not it was her turn to speak, though she had just been specifically asked to. Once again, her hands found her shuttering tits. It looked like she thought twice about pushing one of them into her face. Alba lit another cigarette and sat patiently, waiting in silence, for Ingall to tell her story.

Ingall, stumped, did not begin.

Moments later, Alba leaned over to Flo as if revealing confidential secrets. I heard the word "cumbersome," complimented by a cloud of smoke, hiss from her mouth.

The kid— the hysterical phony— was in visible pain. Soon, he would have to laugh or his brain would shoot out of his ears like smoke through a tea kettle.

The silence was becoming loud and miserable until Ernst made it apparent that the idleness of the group was wearing him down.

"Now just what in the hell is happening?" he wailed.

"Ernst, we're just waiting for Ingall to tell us her story is all," Flo soothed. "These things can be

difficult. We don't want to force the matter on anyone."

"You know how cumbersome it can be, Ernst," Alba reinforced.

"WHAT?!"

I too thought WHAT?! But said nothing.

"Well I'll be good god damned! I'm getting so restless over here I'm getting ready to smear one right into my overalls!" Ernst notified.

That was it for the kid.

An ecstatic seizure had commenced. His laughter was saving his life, releasing a tension more compounded than decades of undesired abstinence. I almost needed to cover my ears. With his frenzied convulsions of amusement, he was blatantly exposing that he was not a user of adult diapers and did not empathize with the nature of the issue; the mask over his charade had been pulled. He assembled himself together, and on his way out of the office he managed to reach into the bag next to Alba, who was not motivated enough nor physically able to fend off against anything, and swipe two pink Depends as souvenirs. He put one on his head as he rushed through the double doors, drooling with laughter in his new hat.

Three participants remained.

Following the cumbersome outburst, Alba managed to fit four cigarettes in her mouth and light them simultaneously. This was going to delay the meeting some more while people regrouped.

Silently.

Ernst tapped his feet, looking from person to person and cranking up his hearing aid to make sure he wasn't missing anything. He wasn't. Ingall appeared to be slowly pulling one of her breasts out of her blouse and into plain view. Flo observed this uneasily, as if she were at the zoo watching a mangy species perform something erotically awkward, while wondering if it was a standard procedure. Then Flo checked to make sure there were no puddles under her seat. All four of Alba's cigarettes were about half-digested. The room was getting so smoky I could hardly see the other side anymore.

Then I saw a flash of light out of the corner of my eye. It was the strike of a match—Alba was lighting another cigarette.

"I can't see a god damn thing," Ernst noted to no one in particular.

"The air in this room is getting cumbersome," Alba reported to Flo through the cigarette smoke. Her cigarette smoke.

I felt unsettled, as if we were all part of a misunderstood showdown where no one knew when, or at whom, they were supposed to shoot.

I could no longer see Ernst, but could tell he was still sitting in front of me by his occasional grunts and thick-diaper-caused adjustments. Alba struck another match, this time to create light in an attempt to see through the smoke. She muttered something. There was some more silence.

"Awww SHIT!" Ernst finally protested. "Where the hell am I? What is this Auschwitz? Is this meeting gonna resume or what? I gotta take a crap and a nap and here I am sittin' in a damned cloud!"

"Oh goodness," Flo squirted uneasily.

"Can I get my check and just get the hell out of this chamber? Or else I'm gonna flip out and drown this diaper! Thick padding my ass, you guys aint seen nothing yet! Is anyone even here?!"

He started waving smoke out of his face to create some clarity.

"Oh Ernst, please try to calm yourself," Flo sheepishly released.

Drowning out Alba's reminders that the situation had become cumbersome was a rabid wail coming from Ingall's location. Starting as a low crescendo and growing until she was hollering like a baritone opera singer being concussed by Mike Tyson, unexplainable anarchy was beginning to blemish the focus group.

"Ingall, is that you?" Alba gargled through the smoke. "You alright over there? Where are you?"

She continued to holler, not necessarily in pain, but like a malfunctioning fire engine siren.

"What about the damned focus group??"

NO ONE SAID ANYTHING.

"That's it!"

I heard footsteps careening towards the door. Then it blew open. Ernst had quit.

Two participants remained.

"Geesh," Flo leaked.

Meanwhile, Ingall continued to shriek. The smoke was beginning to clear now and the two round silhouettes of her bare, overflowing breasts were beginning to prevail through the clouds.

"Ingall?" Flo asked, both trying to confirm that those were human breasts she was seeing, while trying not to intrusively stare.

"Boy if Ernst had seen those his diaper would have stood no chance," Alba belched, referencing Ingall's tits which were now plainly visible, hanging like ripe pineapples drooping from a blade of grass.

"When I'm nervous, I rub them," Ingall confessed to herself as she labored to massage and bludgeon them back into her football helmet-sized bra. The smoke was gone and her face was flushed red. When the bosoms were returned to clogging their cage, she walked towards the door and left, too embarrassed to be seen a minute more after such a performance.

"Uh huh," Alba cackled once the doors closed behind Ingall. "I've seen some things, but..."

It was just me and the two facilitators now, Alba and Flo. The three other Depends Focus Group participants had successfully eliminated themselves, and now I was the only one left, ironically the one who had not participated thus far. I started to get nervous—at this point, I was going to have to speak.

"You get a look at that set a' knockers?" Alba grumbled dryly, this being the second time she had referred to Ingall's gelatinous balloons. "You got those puppies in a room with a man and a few beers, and I believe you've got yourself a cumbersome situation."

"Indeed," Flo concurred. The two woman continued conversing. A cigarette made an appearance.

I remained seated, quiet and still, never once being addressed, and never once opening my mouth.

EMIL DEANDREIS ON SILENCE DEPENDS SUCCESS

They began to pack their paperwork, stack the manila folders and Depends poster advertisements; it seemed the meeting was over. They walked over to me and presented me with a check for \$300 and two Depends visors.

"We have to get going," Flo dribbled. She apologized for the abrupt ending of the meeting, and explained how they were rushed to get to the airport as they had Focus Group meetings the next day in Phoenix and the day after that in Houston. They went on to congratulate me for making such a solid contribution to the illustrious history of Depends Focus Groups.

"Good luck, and thanks for holding it together today," Alba retched. She looked at me and left me with a message that had obviously been rehearsed. "With the personalities and the messiness, these Focus Groups can be cumbersome."

"To say the least."

Author Emil DeAndreis received a degree in Creative Writing from the University of Hawaii at Hilo in 2008. Currently he is a substitute teacher and high school baseball coach in San Francisco. He has had short stories and articles published in *Ku Kilakila: Writing from the Big Island*, *Kanilehua: Hawaii Art Journal*, *Conte Literary*, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, and recently his story "The Pigs Of Hilo," was selected by Bamboo Ridge Press as the Editor's Choice Award for Best New Writer.



Your sweater is browner
than sparrows
you wear it as a way
to go unnoticed
 & lie in the grass
hidden as a cellar
to do your math
sure, the future is coming
but upside down
& outside in
I become a nun
earth is half burnt
the sun is asleep
& your layers array
what new colors are.

Diana Adams is an Alberta based writer with work published in The Boston Review, Drunken Boat, Fogged Clarity, Oranges & Sardines, The Laurel Review, Ekleksogaphia, MiPOesias, OCHO, Shampoo, Pindeldyboz, Poemeleon, Del Sol Review, Perihelion, Bayou, and Spire. Her third book of poetry Hello Ice was recently published by BlazeVOX



GRACE CAVALIERI THE STALKER

She met Don Juan taking out
the garbage,

her face still swollen from
pulling off the bandage.

This is why he sent her chapstick
and tic tacs, orange and white.

The water of discontent
kept her away from her thirst.

If this is the only self you have
would you really give it to him,

a river brown and filled with sticks?

She couldn't cross the bridge but pushed
the floor pedal and went straight through.

Every day new therapy.
Although his story was old

his response was genuine and
she thought, in this way I can go on.

She felt when someone hugged her
they didn't mean it

but he said he did and I think she came
to feel that nothing could destroy her.

She got quieter and quieter until
she lay on her bed like Thumbelina

The party was for young people
but there was that stranger again.

He ran his finger lightly under each half
of her breasts as if she wouldn't notice.

When he pretended she wasn't there
she wanted to act young, though she was not.

Grace Cavalieri has a new play in development ready to bloom in August in NYC. "ANNA NICOLE: BLONDE GLORY" is based on the book Anna Nicole: Poems (2008, GOSS183) winner of the Paterson Award for Literary Excellence, 2009.

NEIL KELLEY VULNERABLE MONKEY PEOPLE

It started off like any other chemo trip.

Unnerving vulnerability acting as if
it's going to move in for eternity,
a squatter trying to unearth one of
the last existing loopholes.

The slip in the system that makes it
more difficult to find home.

A perpetual state of closed eyes and nausea
sets in just before the acceptance of
being watched from within,
takes away free will.

A chimpanzee in a diaper
drowning in black water
interrupts the Banana gods
cultivation of matrimony vines.
The purple flowers will displace

the diaper upon death's final grin.

The ghosts of life like to tap
the breathing on their hunched shoulders
only to evaporate when heads
swivel in false directions.

The wicked, mischievous entities laugh
at medical charts, turn off respirators,
keep the doctors at bay as

beats transform into aspirant flat lines.

Neil Kelly grew up in South Bend, Indiana. His work has appeared in Margie, MiPOesias, Gutter Eloquence, 13 Myna Birds, Black Book Press and others. He currently lives in Denver, Co (with his dog and two cats) where he writes, takes photos, paints, plays in a wiffleball league and enjoys numerous beers. You can contact him at attheturdslinger@gmail.com or see more of his work at turdslinger.blogspot.com

LINDA BENNINGHOFF ONE BRANCH

White heavy snow fell,
the rhododendron leaves creased like knives,
the forsythia bush stood stark and bare,
the ilex shimmered.
Then the weather warmed,
I wore shirt sleeves,
furry bees came.

In the kitchen,
I poured tea
and saw myself
in the reflecting teapot.
My soul still chattered from winter,
but my body felt the snap of spring.

A tree climbed from dark earth
crisscrossed by feet of chipmunks,
hooves of deer.
I could depend on one branch,
pulling out life from the sky.

Linda Benninghoff graduated with honors from Johns Hopkins University where she was an English major. She has a masters in English with an emphasis on creative writing from Stony Brook. She most recently published in Canary: a Journal of the Environmental Crisis. She recently published Whose Cries Are Not Music with Lummo Press.



For instance parakeets—

sir please don't touch the ostrich—ma'am please pick up the Sucrets sorry Luden's wrapper you dropped—oh screw it—don't you scoff at me like my dick of an ex-husband Syd—he thinks a woman's greatest sin is one to leave her husband and two to not have kids—only kids I see are the stuffed kind like that room full of joeys—woah look at that boy run to his mum—must have been a Joey—just a taxidermy joke folks—see that Butterga over on that cheap-ass fiberglass branch—my first dance with transformation done in Taxidermy 101—they wondered about those dun-colored eyes but it was B.G.—before glass—and all I had was rice—gee I know what I'll show ya—we keep her in the back—she fights the “play nice” rites—could be because of her past—my dunce Syd claims she had it planned for months—knew exactly when her husband'd be gone but I don't blame her—those men think they have us women fooled—out in a Honda fondling a blonde and they cruise home dinner insistent—he refused to let her eat the tukkeri she cooked so she ran—flew like a loose canary but it didn't bring her peace—always on the lookout for that beast and when the clown found her he hid in a 7-11 aisle while she bought a bag of gummy worms—oh I see your smiles I see you pat your tummies—yes the story splits—people on both sides of Churinga Street say she hid behind a tree stump—the South side say she hugged the stump but they confuse that time on Coolabah Street when the dudes clear-cut and refused to plant new ones—but those who swear by it say she yelled JUMP and the stump got up pulled its roots free and hopped from its dirt strip—leapt right down Bora Boulevard—the North side talk about a pogo stick dumped behind the stump and what the South side thought a trunk was just brown knees and skirt at an angle—the stump's no longer there but you should have heard the neighborhood kids yell “Leap, Yhi, leap!”—Mirram was her name but they called her Yhi—she leapt so far and so long she wound up at the zoo—next thing she knew surrounded and bound and found living with the other kangaroos—they warmed admired her technique her green KangaROO sneaks—showed her some leaps—they hatched escape plans—walls too high—and though her husband never found her some still slap a moral on it like my ornery Syd—he could have at least offered to stay home with the kids—so that's Mirram nee Yhi and we keep her secret—when they brought her in I didn't know what to expect under this skin—but I'll show you this—now

don't peek—here in her zipper pouch—look quick—
a shiny new pogo stick!

MATTHEW HITTINGER *RESTORATION*

Cousin Judy's trunk never traveled very far :
its hinges, loose, clacked against tin casing

as my father, palms blackened, lowered it
from the attic. I clutched the ashen cross-pieces,

the itchy, unstitched leather of the split handles,
and set to work. Sanded varnish settled

on the tarnished metal, the freed dirt caught
by tack cloth, cloth which could not clean the dust-puttied

reliefs. So I alchemized, shocked the tin. The in-
laid designs surfaced as the black sides changed

to bright silver stems, fronds, and berry-like
blossoms. On the curved lid, two white and blue panels

emerged with larger blossoms, five-pronged leaves, and veins
in each stem and serration. The pattern

tilted on the front and back panels, stretched
and then compacted, the swollen horizontals

like a folded grid aping giraffe hide. I scraped :
walls, lid, floor lined with yellowed paper, red

faded dashes intersecting green dots.
We thought cedar planks would hide the exposed, knotty

pine, and in my father's garage, we rolled out his
work bench. A ten-inch radial arm saw

winked in the light, the corners of its hood
full of wood shavings that stirred when the mounted blade

spun. The bench lacked doors and hinged leafs, wood scraps piled
against one wall. At sixty, my father

still hit a glitch in every project;
this time, the saw would not cut straight. I gophered : shed
to garage to basement, fetched his canvas bag, red
tool box. Saw fixed, he cut each plank in quick
passes; sawdust clouds spewed out the garage
door, past my car; the hum stuck in trees, echoed off
windows and eaves as we locked cedar to cedar,
anchored cedar to pine with a single
nail gun blast. Brads stitched. Air compressor kicked
in. The loud gasps silenced our sparse conversation
as we varied plank breaks to form an organized,
random pattern, the occasional end
edged with a block plane. Twilight fell. I held
a work light. He leveled, aligned, nailed the last planks,
built up one side, then another and when we could
not bend the planks to fit the curved lid, we
squared it, created a space like a false
floor that held not just fragrant air, but our brief words.
Nails refastened the hinges. We added brackets
to displace the weight of the lifted lid,
opened, admired our work : trunk restored
off nothing more than a frame of thin pine and tin.

Matthew Hittinger is the author of the chapbooks Platos de Sal (Seven Kitchens Press, 2009), Narcissus Resists (GOSS183/MiPOesias, 2009), and Pear Slip (Spire Press, 2007) winner of the Spire 2006 Chapbook Award. By day he manages a team of Receptionistas at a secretive hedge fund in midtown Manhattan. His current projects include a collaboration with composer John Glover, and poetry comic strips.



(for Kirk)

MICHELLE ELVY BIRD

It is quieter than quiet
a seabird lands on my deck
squawks his lonely squawk
It's his hello but I tell him to go

I want to be alone with the toenail moon
and the shadows all around
with the familiar line
 - surrounding
where dark night touches down
on black ocean

The wind is light
the sails sigh
and sometimes thwunk. But mostly I
am lulled by the sound of nothing,
the heave and hush
of swell on hull


Ahead lies the longest line
the measure of our existence
it's invisible but real
parts the world in two
North and South: will they feel
as different to me as before and after,
then and now,
life and loss?

Will the South Sea soothe my Chesapeake soul?
will Acrux tug like Polaris used to pull?
will you come to me now,
whisper our history and feed my future,
warm my salt skin, will me on?
I hear you, brother. I remember when
you made harmony with your hands
I see your forever grin

The bird returns. I ask him
where he's from but he flies away
and fades to shadow.
I sail on, west by southwest
the taste of tomorrow
on my tongue

Michelle Elvy lives and writes on a sailboat, where she views the great big world from a small space. A 2010 Pushcart nominee, she is the founder and co-editor of 52|250: A Year of Flash and Associate Editor of Blue Five Notebook.





Diego Quiros
Angela Pinedo
Emil DeAndreis
Scot Siegel
NF Huth
Ken Taylor
JP Dancing Bear
Angela Lawlor
Kate Hammerich
Diana Adams,
Grace Cavalieri
Neil Kelly
Linda Benninghoff
Matthew Hittinger